

## What is Date Marking and why is it important?

Date marking is a means to control the growth of Listeria, a bacteria that grows at refrigeration temperatures. Date marking is a system that identifies how old foods are and when those foods should be discarded before these bacteria can cause foodborne illness.

## What foods must be Date Marked?

Foods that meet all of the following conditions are required to be date marked:

- Foods that are ready to eat, or that *could* be eaten regardless of temperature, **and**
- require refrigeration, **and**
- are considered potentially hazardous, this includes meat, dairy, seafood, cooked vegetables, cooked rice or pasta, cut melons, and raw seed sprouts, **and**
- are prepared and held in the establishment for more than 24 hours.

## Do commercially packaged foods with a use by date placed by the manufacturer have to be Date Marked?

No, in Alabama the date limit placed by the manufacturer is sufficient.

## What about raw meats?

Some raw meats may be received with a manufacturer's date limit that would be followed even if the product is further processed or repackaged.

## What date should be placed on the food?

The date placed on the product reflects the last day the food can be consumed, sold, or discarded. The day of preparation counts as day 1.

Foods that can be held at refrigeration temperatures of 41°F or less may be date marked for seven days.

## What if I freeze the food?

Freezing food "stops" the date marking clock but does not reset it.

## What if I combine food that was opened or prepared on different days?

When foods are mixed together the date of the **oldest** food becomes the reference date for Date Marking.

## How do I mark the date?

Options may include using the actual date on the container, color codes, day dots, or any other system. Whatever system is used must be understandable, effective, and clear to both employees and the inspector.

